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Integrate moral, religious values in education system

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Education Minister Dr Maszlee Malik (centre), who is also Simpang Renggam member of parliament, with qariah members of Al-Huda Mosque in Simpang Renggam after Friday prayers, recently. FILE PIC

By Dr Md. Mahmudul Hasan (/authors/dr-md-mahmudul-hasan) - June 2, 2018 @ 10:21am

SINCE the initial dust has now settled and Dr Maszlee Malik assumed the education minister portfolio, it is perhaps timely to reflect on his suitability for the job.

Dr Maszlee is an academic with decades of affiliation with a university and has memberships and fellowships with research institutions and think tanks. Therefore, many must have thought that his appointment as education minister would make perfect sense. But it did not to some commentators and petitioners. They did not see the logic and did not welcome Prime Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's decision.

In their opinion, Dr Maszlee's PhD in good governance from a reputable Western university, plurilingual repertoire and shuttling between the academic disciplines of Islamic jurisprudence and political science did not give him an edge.

Before the Simpang Renggam member of parliament was sworn in as education minister on May 21, opposition to his appointment were clichéd terms and banal vocabulary. His attached labels such as "Islamist", "Salafist", and "defender of Zakir Naik", "supporter of extremism" and "Muslim Brotherhood sympathiser". What they seemed to oppose is his "leanings" and possible inculcation of Islamic values in the education system of a Muslim-majority country.

There may be debates about how religion is taught in Malaysian schools of various levels and what changes the new education minister should make; but, dismissing the need for (Islamic) teachings in public education amounts to a denial of the reality of educational and social life. The petitioners against Dr Maszlee are not mindful of the fact that an education system imbued with Islamic values can be a panacea for a multitude of problems such as corruption, sexual misconduct, smoking and other addictions, substance abuse, poor work and other dangerous behaviours.

There was a campaign to malign the character of Dr Maszlee and to associate him with "indoctrination" and "radicalisation". This is unfair. Dr Maszlee may be a newbie in active politics but he has a long career of research, teaching and public/academic speaking.

Given the fact that humanity is in the grip of a worldwide crisis in education, it is untenable to regard religion as irrelevant to the education system. It is worrisome to conscientious people both in the East and West that education has been increasingly confined to professional skills and training for employment only.

Harvard professor Harry Lewis, in his book, *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* (2006), sums up the crisis in modern education: "Society is going to the moon, and the great universities are going to get there first".

According to Lewis, modern educational institutions largely "feed students candy rather than tougher stuff that will strengthen their ethical bones". Teachers and lecturers "treat a tube of toothpaste: they squeeze out a little bit of material every day ... and they try to ensure that the tube is empty at the end of the term, clenching the tube in both fists during the final exam if necessary".

Nowadays, educational attainments are driven by selfish reasons such as greed for money and status, lust for power and other materialistic ends. Most students choose universities for reasons of career concerns only. As a result, "the relationship of the students to the college" has become "increasingly that of a consumer to a vendor of expensive goods and services". Sadly, the accumulation of wealth and reckless material aggrandizement seems to have become the sole reason for the pursuit of education. As a result, compassion, honesty, integrity and other cherished and treasured values are gradually disappearing from society. Eventually, sufferers will not be only a certain religious group, rather the entire humanity.

I am not suggesting that education should be otherworldly and out of touch with contemporary society and its structures. What I argue for here is the integration of moral and religious values in pedagogical practices. The best way to address the educational crisis is the integration approach to embrace the faith and learning. This involves inculcating religious and universally accepted moral values in teaching and learning.

In this respect, Dr Maszlee's Islamic background should be a reason to celebrate, not a cause for concern. Time will tell us about the extent of his success or failure as education minister. To pass judgment on the basis of his "religious leanings" only is ill-considered and hasty.

On a final note, those who seek to dichotomise Islam and education should bear in mind that the first revelation that Prophet Muhammad received from God is the command to: "Read" (Quran, 96:1).

According to Quranic verses 2:251, 3:48, 12:37 and 18:65-66, all prophets invariably received the inestimable blessing of knowledge from God; and the term *ilm* (knowledge) and its derivatives appear hundreds of times in the Quran. What is more, Prophet Muhammad famously said: "I have been sent as a teacher."

The scope of this article does not allow me to elaborate more on the Islamic concept of education. However, suffice to say that, contrary to the charges of rigidity and backwardness, Islamic education and Islamic world view interpretations — being organic and fluid — can be oriented towards specific life domains without compromising the basic principles of Islam.

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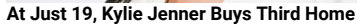
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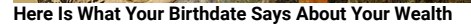
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World Cup scorers

In 2014, Miroslav Klose set a new World Cup goals record. Thomas Muller heads the table of current players

2018 TOP SCORERS

	Harry Kane	153	5
	Cristiano Ronaldo	180	4

Miroslav Klose Germany

Tournaments: 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014

16

Ronaldo Brazil

1998, 2002, 2006

15

Gerd Muller Germany

1970, 1974

14

Just Fontaine France

1958

13

Pele Brazil

1958, 1962, 1966, 1970

12

Sandor Kocsis Hungary

1954

11

Jurgen Klinsmann Germany

1990, 1994, 1998

11

Thomas Muller Germany

2010, 2014

10

Muller

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